

VZCZCXRO2339
PP RUEHBC RUEHDE RUEHIHL RUEHKUK
DE RUEHGB #0620/01 0511804
ZNY SSSS ZZH
P 201804Z FEB 07
FM AMEMBASSY BAGHDAD
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9781
INFO RUCNRAQ/IRAQ COLLECTIVE

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 BAGHDAD 000620

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/14/2017

TAGS: PGOV PINS PREL IR IZ

SUBJECT: MAYSAN GOVERNOR DISCUSSES SECURITY SITUATION,
IRAN, POLITICAL DEVELOPMENTS

Classified By: PRT Maysan Team Leader Julie Nutter for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

¶1. (U//REL USA, MCFI) This is a PRT Maysan cable.

Summary

¶2. (C//REL USA, MCFI) In a January 22 meeting with the new head of Multinational Forces Division (Southeast), Maysan Governor Adil Al-Maliki focused on his province's upcoming transition to Provincial Iraqi Control (PIC), noting that the security situation in Maysan was currently calm. Attributing much of the provincial violence in October 2006 to the tribal rivalry underlying militias and the "ignorance" of certain armed groups that still consider Coalition Forces to be an occupying army, Al Maliki highlighted the competence of provincial officials in meeting the challenge. Al Maliki told the Commander that to go fully to PIC, the province needed arms and training for the Iraqi Army and Police Force, as well as reconstruction projects. He advised the Commander that the road to PIC in Basra will be difficult, and that the UK and US will have to "change the face" of CF, reducing the visible signs of military force and concentrating more on restoring/providing essential services to Basra's citizens. Regarding Iranian involvement in Maysan, Al Maliki said that Maysanis are tied to Iran "ethnically, religiously, and geographically" and that for Coalition Forces to take steps like closing the Sheeb border crossing will only have deleterious economic consequences. He added that he would agree to extra security measures to reduce the weapons flow, as long as commerce could continue. Addressing Iran's general influence in Iraq, Al Maliki noted that Iran will act in its own interests, not Iraqi interests, and that Iran wants to "move the borders of its war with the West to Iraq."

End Summary.

Security in Maysan

¶3. (U//REL USA, MCFI) On January 22, Maysan Provincial Governor Adil Mohder Al-Maliki met in Basra with the new Commander of Multinational Division, Southeast (MND-SE), Major General Jonathan Shaw. The Governor began the introductory meeting by noting that he and General Shaw shared the same aims: 1) to establish security within Iraq in general; 2) to establish security in Maysan; and 3) to transition to Provincial Iraqi Control in the province as soon as possible. Al-Maliki highlighted the importance of continued dialogue in that process.

¶4. (C//REL USA, MCFI) Al-Maliki observed that security in Maysan was much improved, at one point claiming that Maysan did not have "real, ideological terrorism, like IEDs." Maysan, he claimed, has "turned that page", by which he presumably was referring to the recent ending of the state of

emergency in the province, some of the actions of the new police chief, and the tentative assessment from MND-SE that Maysan was on the cusp of PIC readiness.

¶15. (C//REL USA, MCFI) General Shaw noted that some of the past difficulties between Coalition Forces (CF) and Maysan stemmed from an Iraqi wish not to have others dictate to them. The Governor agreed that the desire to control one's own affairs was human nature; and noted that "London would not like Washington running things" either. Building on the Governor's comments, General Shaw asked whether Maysan would tolerate Iranian control. The Governor deflected the question, saying he would return to the subject of Iran later in the conversation.

¶16. (C//REL USA, MCFI) The Governor then described his efforts and those of other provincial officials to hold meetings with political parties and tribal leaders in the province to underline the necessity of entering the political process. On one hand, he said, Maysan needs to deal with this process diplomatically, and rely on dialogue. On the other hand, there are security issues that must be addressed; he had met in Baghdad with General Casey and other governors and stressed the need for training and equipping the Iraqi army and the police force.

Iran in Maysan

¶17. (S//REL USA, MCFI) Turning back to Iran, the Governor noted that "Iran would work for its own interests" in Iraq and "wishes to move the battlefield with the West to Iraq". The extent of Iranian influence in the province was

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understandable) Maysan's population is "ethnically, religiously, and geographically" related to Iran. There are also, the Governor added, Iranian security service personnel in Maysan, he said, along with those from the Syrian and Saudi Arabian services.

¶18. (C//REL USA, MCFI) General Shaw asked the Governor how he managed to effect a disbanding of the emergency security committee in Maysan. The Governor said he had convinced officials in Baghdad that there was no longer a need for the emergency committee since conditions had improved enough in Maysan to return security control to provincial officials. (Comment: The replacement of Abu Maythem as police chief with General Hassan was presumably part of the deal struck. End Comment.) Continuing on the security theme, the Governor observed that "it was good" that General Shaw's predecessor did not take violent steps in Maysan during the emergency period, but he did not elaborate on the comment.

¶19. C//REL USA, MCFI) When asked by General Shaw what had precipitated the violence in Al Amara in October, Al-Maliki claimed that "some groups" in Maysan have not yet digested the changing security circumstances in Maysan. They still see Multinational Forces as an occupying army. What MNF needs to do, according to the Governor, is to "change the face" of CF) provide services, reduce the visible armed presence, and make the transition to PIC.

¶110. (C//REL USA, MCFI) General Shaw thanked Al-Maliki for his advice, but returned to the subject, noting that fighting between Jayesh Al Madhi and the Badr Brigades seemed to be the cause for most of the violence. The Governor agreed, but also attributed the violence to underlying inter-tribal rivalry, saying that "JAM has tribal links, so do the Badr Brigades." However, the situation was brought under control by the province itself; and "even Margaret Beckett (UK Foreign Secretary) complimented the way local officials dealt with the situation." When General Shaw asked if violence was likely to break out again, Al-Maliki asked him if he believed in the expression "Inshallah". Al-Maliki added that he did

not completely believe in fate; that individuals have to do their best to shape a situation and then God assists.

Moving to PIC

¶11. (C//REL USA, MCFI) When General Shaw asked the Governor what he needed to go to PIC, Al-Maliki said he needed arms, equipment, and training for the Iraqi army and police, as well as reconstruction projects. Turning to Basra, the General asked the Governor what his thoughts were on what Basra would need to make the same transition. Al-Maliki underlined that Basra was a more difficult challenge) it has Shia, Sunnis, and Wahabbis; a much larger population; is the location of five sets of major land or water crossroads; is a major economic engine for Iraq; and is the site of much of Iraq's oil storage capacity. What the MNF need to do in Basra, he said, is to "calm the anger" and "contain" the violence. The solution is not "amputation", but containment.

¶12. (C//REL USA, MCFI) The Governor then focused on reconstruction, complaining that media reports portray the UK as not pulling its weight on reconstruction projects compared with the US and the Japanese. The General noted that Iraqi money, not funds from international donors, is the source of the most significant amount of reconstruction funds, and MNF and the PRT could assist in Maysan's effort to tap into these funds. PRT Team Leader offered the services of the PRT in that effort.

¶13. (C//REL USA, MCFI) The Governor then returned to political subjects, telling the General that he followed the teachings of Moqtada al Sadr, but as a "spiritual ideology," not as a political affiliation. Sadr, he said is the link between God and individuals. "I have struggles with JAM", he claimed, but "even with JAM, diplomacy can work." It doesn't mean, he added, that "I don't believe in decisive military action when needed. I do. But I start with diplomacy." Right now, he noted, the IA and the police are clearing some areas of Al Amarah of "criminal" elements.

Potential Sheeb Border Closure

¶14. (C//REL USA, MCFI) The General then raised the possible GOI closure of the Sheeb border crossing into Iran, one of the most significant border crossings in Maysan. He pointed out the concerns of MNF regarding the large number of weapons being smuggled into Iraq from Iran, particularly through

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Maysan. The General pointedly asked the Governor whether he could influence the situation.

¶15. (C//REL USA, MCFI) The Governor claimed the number of weapons smuggled was exaggerated, and said that British border operations were having an effect in reducing the numbers. Maysan was not the main transit point, he said, for the following reasons: British border operations were successful; if Maysan were the main transit point, there would be more anti-Coalition operations in Maysan; and border trade had been going on at the border crossing for years with no problems. (Comment: We were not convinced. End comment.)

¶16. (C//REL USA, MCFI) Blocking Sheeb does not make sense, said the Governor. It would have serious economic consequences on trade (particularly agricultural trade) and on transport; increase prices; and lead to significant unemployment, especially for drivers. The Governor said that he would be happy to have extra security measures put into place to reduce the smuggling, but would not advocate closure.

Comment

¶17. (C//REL USA, MCFI) The Governor, in Basra for a meeting of the PRT and the Provincial Reconstruction and Development Committee, was clearly focused in his MND-SE meeting on the near-term prospect of Maysan going to PIC. The transition, and perhaps larger political developments in Baghdad, are having a salutary effect on the level of cooperation the PRT is experiencing with the Governor and the Provincial Reconstruction and Development Committee, but as the Governor's comments on the October violence reveal, the reasons for violence in Maysan are complex and multi-layered.

With militia and tribal rivalries as well as in Iranian and other external influences bearing down, the security situation will most likely remain unpredictable, even after PIC is achieved. That said, the PRT will work to make the most of this relative calm and the resumed cooperation, however fleeting it may be. End comment.

KHALILZAD